Why is Proper English important?

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ABSTRACT: Proper English a major part of our daily lives but does anyone know how to actually use it? When you’re at work the type of English you use will dictate the mood of the office. When you travel across the country you will learn about all the different kinds of slang. For people who use English as a second language its hard for them to use proper English because they pronounce words differently. Regardless of how you feel about proper English it will dictate your life in someway or another.

KEYWORDS: *proper English, foreign, formal English*

Why is Proper English Important?

“Today we’re going to tackle an interesting question: When we talk about “Proper English,” what exactly do we mean? Do we mean the English that you can take home to your grandmother? Do we mean the English that will impress your boss? Or do we mean the English that everyone will understand” (Little, 2012, par. 1)? Does anyone even know what proper English even is? Is it using correct grammar? Maybe it’s using correct pronunciation? Is it both? I don’t think anyone knows what proper English actually is. Some people view proper English as a must. On the contrary, many people view it as something that is unnecessary. I will be viewing both sides of the argument in this controversial topic.

When going to a work setting many people turn on their serious face and start using “proper English.” This creates a very serious work environment which some believe allows for more work to get done. Others believe that this creates a work environment that is too serious and can hinder people from getting work done. Personally I like to be in a work environment where I can feel comfortable and have fun. When I’m in an environment where everything is very serious I can’t get anything done and the thought of doing fun things often distracts me. Many people will argue that an environment that is fun will hinder from work getting done. I’m assuming they’ve never watched the office before.

In the article “*Why Speaking Proper English is Important For Your Career”* Exforsys states that “No matter what career you choose, whether it is Engineering or History, having a powerful command of the English language will greatly increase your odds of success. Generally, your vocabulary will need to be equal to those who are in the same career field” (Exforsys, 2006, par. 2). In this article he talks about how to be able to preform a well at your job you have to have a very good understanding of the English language. If your peers can’t understand you, you will have a hard time working with them.

But what if everyone you worked with just spoke formally. It would be a much more friendly environment where everybody is confortable. Clearly everyone would still have the knowledge to speak proper English but they choose to speak a formal English. They will still respect each other and make sure they talk about appropriate work related things. More work will get done when you’re in an environment where you feel comfortable. Over the summer I worked at a country club and I love the people I worked with, expect one guy. I would joke around and laugh with all my coworkers and that would allow me to be more comfortable around the members. But whenever he worked with me he would always try and correct my grammar and question the slang I used, it always ruined my mood and I noticed that my performance wasn’t as good as normal. His inability to understand that I was speaking in a formal manner really irked me. This was a job where having fun and joking around was acceptable and he couldn’t grasp that concept. There are times where speaking formally is correct and times where it isn’t acceptable.

Proper English can be very beneficial when traveling to other states that may not use the same slang that you do. When someone from the south comes up to the north they may often say y’all which is a term that isn’t normally used in the north. A Major problem with proper English is the different slang that different regions have. Every state has their own accent that they come with and even their own terms. A great example comes from the article “*Looking at Language*” where Richard Lederer states that, “In northern New England, they take the term *milk shake* quite literally. To many residing in that little corner of the country, a milk shake consists of milk mixed with flavored syrup – and nothing more – shaken up until foamy. If you live in Rhode Island or in southern Massachusetts and you want ice cream in you milk drink, you ask for a cabinet” (Lederer, 2009, p. 9). This was shocking to me; I had never even known this. It was a good thing I read this article before I went to New England or I would’ve been very disappointed after ordering a milk shake. Its crazy to see how different every state is from one another. Even simple things (or things I thought were simple) are different in every state. Now a milk shake doesn’t really have much to do with proper English but it explains how people in New England intemperate words. They take the literal meaning of the word milk shake and make the drink based on that. I don’t even want to know how a hot dog is made there. They way you speak in certain situations affects how people understand you.

I always tend to forget that different regions of the country have different types of slang and so do different cities in the same state. This became very apparent to me when my friend that I meet at Central Michigan University came to visit me in my hometown West Bloomfield, MI. He came to hangout my friends and me. My friends and I enjoy speaking in slang because we think it sounds cooler. So while we were hanging out he had to ask us what we mean. We were using slang terms like “fash” (short for forsure) and “I have opens” (which means their was no one at our house). Its almost like we created a small community with our own language. We created a language that seems foreign to most people. For most people learning a foreign language can be very hard to learn.

Speaking proper English is normal for most Americans because that how they were raised and its second nature to them. When you grow up hearing people speak a certain way you can pick up on it and as long as you’ve been exposed to proper English as a kid its easy to pick up on. What about people who weren’t born or raised in America?

It almost seems that if you aren’t American you won’t be able to speak proper English. A large element of the English language is pronunciation. Both my parents are from Albanian and they speak English very well, but it still is their second language so they still have a hard time pronouncing some words. The accent that they have from when they were living in Albania mixes in when they say certain words in English. I’ve gotten used to this and ignore it but my friends have a hard time understanding them sometimes. This same thing goes for me when I speak Albanian to my grandparents or my family back in Albania. I use an English accent when speaking Albanian and it makes it hard for people to understand me. In the article “*The Importance of Proper Pronunciation”* the author states,“Native speakers can perceive bad pronunciation as a lack of language competence.  Speakers with strong accent can be hard to understand or even unpleasant to listen to.  Social interaction can be significantly impeded by this, as such a person is likely to face difficulties in getting through to native speakers” (Saundz, 2012, par. 3). Clearly the accent you speak with affects how you pronounce words, which can affect they way people understand you.

On the topic of foreign languages that make it tough to speak proper English, Ebonics has been a very big topic of debate. Ever since it became recognized as the primary language of African Americans students in 1996 it sparked lots of controversy. “Ebonics was variously described as “lazy English,” “bastardized English,” “poor grammar,” and “fractured slang” (Clark, Eschhdz, Rosa, Simon, 2008, p. 414). Many American people were upset that this language that they viewed as a broken version of English was being viewed as a primary language. This was just one of the many outrages that were sparked by changes in primary languages.

“As a fourth grade teacher, my credibility and professionalism are constantly evaluated by the students and parents I work with. If I can't speak and write using the proper English I am trying to model and impart to my students, I am an utter fraud” (Newman, n.d., par. 4). Ms. Newman says that without her ability to speak proper English she wouldn’t be viewed as a professional and wouldn’t get the respect she needs for job. As a teacher students and parents expect you to be vey professional at all times. Teachers are role models for their students so if they goof off and talk in a manner that isn’t proper they wont be setting a good example.

The teachers of high school or college students are expected to have a very great understanding of the English language: one that is much better than their students. If a 4th grader teacher spoke to her students the same way a she would a college student that wouldn’t be good. Maybe this idea of proper English is situational. We try to define everything without really considering that in certain situations it may not be as good as others. Their isn’t really a true definition so both sides of this argument have valid arguments: so instead of arguing about which is “correct” we should put together both sides and try and find a middle ground where it works in every situation.

Clearly both sides make very valid arguments. Proper English is something that can’t really be defined because it has a constantly changing definition. There are many situations where formal English is very acceptable: the same goes for proper English. You wouldn’t want to walk into job interview saying “Yo, whats up bro?” It’s very important to know when and when not to use proper English.

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